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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHJA/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 003174

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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM -- CONTINUED PRESSURE ON ISLAMIC
SECTS

REF: JAKARTA 3042

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The leader of a small Islamic sect--Al-Qiyadah--labeled deviant by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has announced that he has "repented" and returned to mainstream Islam. Police and the MUI continue to investigate Al-Qiyadah and other minority sects, and are actively pressuring Al-Qiyadah followers to convert back to Sunni orthodox Islamic teachings. Mainstream Islamic groups have been broadly supportive of police and MUI handling of the matter. Some NGO leaders, however, fear the government's treatment of the sect puts fundamental rights at risk. Mission continues to stress the need for religious freedom and tolerance. END SUMMARY.

RETURNING TO THE "TRUE PATH"

¶2. (C) The leader of the small Islamic sect Al-Qiyadah has apologized for his actions. Achmad Moshaddeq, who claimed to be an Islamic prophet, "repented" and announced his return to mainstream Islam and the "true path." Following two days of meetings with the police and two key Muslim organizations--MUI and Nahdlatul Ulama--Moshaddeq addressed the public on November 9. He admitted that he was just "a regular human being" and conceded that "there isn't and there won't be any other prophets other than Muhammad until judgment day." He remains under police detention.

¶3. (C) The comments followed weeks of mounting pressure against the small, but rapidly growing sect that had apparently unsettled mainstream Islamic groups across Java, Sumatra and parts of Sulawesi. Police and MUI efforts to control the growth of sects in Indonesia was supported this week by a Supreme Court ruling that sentenced the deputy leader of a separate sect to three years in prison.

¶4. (C) Moshaddeq may escape from the affair without too many problems after his recantation, though many of his followers continue to face persecution. In his public remarks, Moshaddeq announced plans to spread "true" Islamic teachings from now on. Police have also speculated that his "conversion" may help him escape prosecution. Efforts to convict Moshaddeq on charges of blasphemy, which carries a maximum five-year sentence, are further complicated by the

fact that the Attorney General's Office has not yet banned Al-Qiyadah despite the urgings of the MUI. For Moshaddeq's followers, the future is not bright. An Al-Qiyadah member in hiding in Jakarta told poloff that followers face a choice between jail and re-conversion to Sunni orthodox Islam. Our contact alleged that police are demanding as much as Rp 5,000,000 (more than \$500 USD) to carry out "re-conversions."

CONCERNS

¶ 15. (C) Moshaddeq's announcement could cause the Al-Qiyadah controversy to disappear as quickly as it arose. A member of MUI's fatwa committee told poloff that since Moshaddeq's apology, the situation has "stabilized." Police and MUI handling of the sect has been broadly supported by mainstream Islamic groups. A member of Muhammadiyah's Central Board told poloff that the group fully supports MUI and recognizes MUI's responsibility "to define" Islam.

¶ 16. (C) In a November 14 meeting with Mission officers, the Chair of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) said he supported police actions to limit the freedom of belief only in order to preserve public order. However, Komnas HAM is conducting an assessment of freedom of religion in Indonesia, he added, an area of increasing concern among human rights and other activists. Sidney Jones--an Amcit and Indonesia expert with the International Crisis Group--told Pol/C she was concerned that the government's handling of the problem was putting freedom of religion and expression at risk. She said MUI and other organizations were trying to enforce a form of Sunni orthodoxy throughout the country and "crush" Islamic groups that held other forms of belief. What

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was even of greater concern, she added, was that the Indonesian government was working with MUI to put pressure on the sects.

A POSITIVE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RECORD

¶ 17. (C) Indonesia has a generally positive religious freedom record, though human rights issues do come up from time to time. Jones noted that the country was "basically tolerant" toward its many ethnic and religious groups. That said, these actions against Islamic sects hurt that positive record. Mission will continue to underscore our concerns to the Indonesian government.

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